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A Loyal Renegade

A COMEDY
IN ONE ACT

— BY —

MARGARET CAMERON SMITH

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA.
ENQUIRER PUBLISHING COMPANY,
416 TENTH ST.
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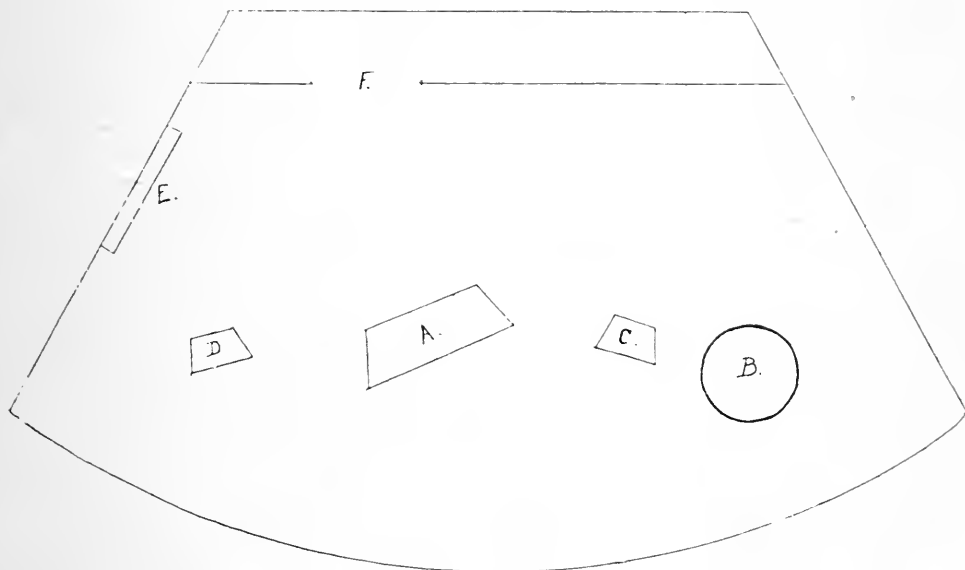
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CHARACTERS.

Phyllis Arlington, an impressionable, tender-hearted girl, suffering from an acute attack of philosophic indigestion, superinduced by the consumption of various half-baked theories administered by her friend, Mrs. Treavor.

Robert Chalmers, a practical, resolute young man, very much in love with Phyllis.



STAGE

SCENE—DRAWING-ROOM.

A. small sofa.
B. table, with lighted lamp, books, magazines, etc.
C. easy chair.

D. small chair.
E. fireplace, with open fire.
F. exit to hall.
Potted palms, piano, bric-a-brac, etc., ad lib.

(Phyllis discovered sitting on sofa, i. e., doing fancywork. Rob lounges in easy chair, l. c., watching her.)

Phyllis. Well, Kipling may be all that you say, but to me he seems de-

plorably lacking in delicacy and idealism.

Robert. I fancy that life in India may not be conducive to the development of either of those qualities. But

he is keen and direct, with an apparently inexhaustible vein of humor and a command of the English language that is simply marvelous. Moreover, he never goes into mawkish, morbid analysis of the commonplace, nor does he write unhealthy books that, to use his own words, "deal with people's insides from the point of view of men who have no stomachs."

P. (Laughing.) Rob, you quote Kipling as other people quote the Bible, and you have an appropriate text for any occasion.

R. (Taking up book from table.) Well, one can't open one of his books without finding something worth reading. Listen to this, for instance. (Reads.) "How can a man who has never married; who cannot be trusted to pick up at sight a moderately sound horse; whose head is hot and upset with visions of domestic felicity, go about the choosing of a wife? He cannot see straight or think straight if he tries; and the same disadvantages exist in the case of a girl's fancies. But when mature, married and discreet people arrange a match between a boy and a girl, they do it sensibly, with a view to the future, and the young couple live happily ever afterward. As everybody knows." (Laughs.) What a jolly, sarcastic beggar he is!

P. Does that impress you as being sarcasm?

R. (Lowering book to stare at her.) Great Scott! Does that impress me as being sarcasm! What else could it be?

P. Well, I know one can't be too certain of Kipling's opinions; but at any rate, he might mean that. Many people would agree with him.

R. Humph! (Raises book as if to continue reading.)

P. Now, for instance, that has been for a long time a favorite theory of mine, and if the day ever comes when I care enough for a man to want to marry him, I shall refer the matter to a committee of our friends and abide by their decision.

R. (Hotly, throwing book aside.) Do you mean to say that if you loved

a man, you would permit any one else to decide for you whether or not you should marry him?

P. (Calmly.) I mean precisely that. I should deem myself prejudiced and consequently unfit to decide so important a question.

R. (Leaning forward and speaking argumentatively.) But, Phyllis, can't you see how absurd it is? The idea of expecting—or permitting—any one else to decide for you a question that concerns you so vitally; a matter so purely personal!

P. (Stops working and speaks earnestly.) That is just the point. It does concern me so vitally that I can't be expected to view it from a rational point of view. I am too near it; I have no perspective. And I am surprised to hear you speak of marriage as purely a personal matter, Rob.

R. But no one else can know your heart; so how—

P. For that very reason anybody else's judgment would be better than mine. What right have two people to say, "Because we love each other, we will marry, be the consequences what they may"? That kind of love has been well defined as "an egotism of two."

R. (Rising impatiently.) And in its place you would establish an intellectual companionship which, after it has been investigated and approved by your cold-blooded committee, you will allow to expand—perhaps—into a calm affection. Cupid with a microscope! (Crosses to fireplace, r., and makes pretense of warming hands.)

P. (Resignedly, resuming work.) Indeed, you misunderstand me! But Mrs. Treavor says that in questions relating to marriage, people think far too much of their own selfish desires, and far too little of the effect of their indulgence upon Humanity.

R. Did Mrs. Treavor marry to benefit humanity?

P. (Sadly.) No, and she has realized her mistake and suffered bitterly for it.

R. (Turning toward her.) Did she tell you that, too?

P. (Drops work at l. of sofa and

turns toward him, speaking earnestly over back of sofa.) Oh, no! How can you be so unfair to her, Rob! But one who knows her well can see how bravely she struggles to make the most of what life has left possible for her.

R. (Standing back to fireplace, hands behind him.) Well, it has left a good deal. Joe Treavor is one of the straightest, manliest fellows I know.

P. Oh, yes! I dare say,—from a man's point of view, but so lacking in perception, in—in—

R. (Bluntly.) Well, in what?

P. Oh, in everything that a woman likes Mrs. Treavor needs.

R. Why, then, did she marry him?

P. That's just it! She loved him and idealized him, and so, of course, she couldn't see that he was of too coarse a fibre to satisfy her soul-needs.

R. Her soul-fiddlesticks! (Crosses to table, picking up P.'s fancywork on the way. Lays it on table.)

P. (Indignantly.) Rob! If you only knew Mrs. Treavor you would understand how fine and strong and womanly she is, and what a perpetual sacrifice her life has been.

R. (Taking up book again.) Perhaps I should, and yet—I am only a man, you know.

P. Yes, but such a—(Stops in confusion.)

R. (Throwing book aside and going toward her eagerly.) Yes? You were about to say?

P. You are so different from other men; so reasonable; so much more sympathetic; so—oh, you know!

R. (Behind the divan.) Phyllis, am I different enough to—to—

P. (Affecting surprise.) To what, Rob?

R. (Bending over her.) To win you, dear? I love you, Phyllis! I know I am not a poet, and I don't understand lots of your theories, but I love you! —(Phyllis screens her face from him) —Phyllis?

P. (Starts.) Yes?

R. (Eagerly.) Are you offended? Why don't you answer me?

P. (Archly.) Did you ask anything?

R. (Takes her hand.) Don't trifle, dear! I ask everything! Your love—and you. Do you love me, Phyllis! A little?

P. (Archly.) Yes—a little.

R. Phyllis! (Tries to put his arms about her, but she springs up and eludes him. She crosses to r.) Really, really, you love me?

P. (Keeping chair r. between them.) Really, really, I—love you. (He moves around chair. She crosses to sofa.) But you must behave very well if you expect me to continue to do so. For example—(He advances; she backs away)—you must not be—greedy.

R. (At r. of sofa.) But, dearest!

P. (At l. of sofa, teasingly.) Well—dearest?

R. (Pleadingly.) Phyllis, dear, don't tease—now!

P. Very well; I will be as serious as you choose, if you will promise—

R. Yes?

P. To treat me as a prisoner of war and not as a target.

R. (Reproachfully.) A prisoner, Phyllis?

P. Have I not surrendered? (He moves quickly toward her. She withdraws. He steps back to chair r.)

R. Very well, I promise. Come out from behind your fortifications. (She sits on end of divan nearest him. He sits on chair r.)

P. (Pensively.) I wonder what Mrs. Treavor will say.

R. What matter? I am content to know what you have said. (Edges chair nearer her.) Phyllis, when will you marry me?

P. (Surprised and alarmed.) Marry you? Oh!—why—let's not talk about that!

R. Phyllis! What do you mean?

P. (Breathless.) Why, you know, there is something to consider first.

R. (Eagerly.) Yes, I know—my income, and all that. It is ample, dear.

P. (Hurt.) Oh, Rob! I didn't mean that. I'm not so sordid.

R. (Bewildered.) Then what? What else? Is anybody's consent required? We are orphans and of age.

P. Yes, but I wonder if—they will—will let us—marry?

R. (Astonished.) They? Who in thunder are they?

P. Why, my friends, you know, to whom I must submit the matter.

R. (Relieved.) Oh, your people! Why, of course they will! I suppose I must ask your uncle, as a matter of form, for your hand; but that will be all right. Both he and your aunt know that I love you, and they have been very kind to me.

P. Oh, uncle Jerry! Of course he won't object. If he did, I could coax him out of it in five minutes. Ah! ah! (As he moves impulsively toward her, she moves away from him, and he sits beside her.) And auntie would agree with uncle Jerry. She always does.

R. (Bewildered.) Well, then, who else is there whom we must consult?

P. (Faintly.) The—the committee.

R. The committee! What committee? Surely, Phyllis, you don't intend—you can't intend to refer this matter to—oh, pshaw! Of course you don't!

P. (Firmly.) But I do, Rob! I must! Don't you see? We are in no position to judge whether or not our marriage would be best for us—best for humanity.

R. Why aren't we?

P. Because we love each other. (He tries impulsively to put his arm around her. She shrinks from him.) No, no, Rob! You mustn't, indeed, you mustn't, until—we are certain.

R. (Gravely.) Aren't you certain now, Phyllis?

P. That I care, yes; but not that I dare marry you. (Rises.) Our judgment is so warped now, by our love for each other—(Crosses to r. c.)—that it is impossible for us to be entirely rational. But so much depends upon the wise solution of this problem, not only for us, but for society, that we must invoke the aid of earnest, serious minds, and rely absolutely upon their conclusions.

R. (Rises, crossing to l.) Far be it from me to question the wisdom of the East, but it will be some years, I fancy, before that eminently Oriental idea takes root and flourishes in the

Occidental mind. Why, Phyllis, that is the philosophy of India, where happy marriages, as we understand them, are absolutely unknown.

P. Mrs. Treavor says that no one can estimate the psychic influence of the home; its potentiality is limitless; its consequences so far-reaching as to be incalculable; and if the elements combining in its atmosphere are not well balanced, only evil can result.

R. But, Phyllis, dear—

P. She says, too, that only by awakening the cosmic consciousness in man, and a sense of his personal relation to all mental causation, can we hope to establish ideal conditions and become quite free. (Crosses slowly to divan.) And so, we must enter reverently into the realm of cause, and abide by its laws, Rob.

R. How are you going to ascertain all this, Phyllis?

P. (Sits as before.) I suppose we never can be absolutely certain, but we must do all we can to find out, mustn't we, Rob?

R. (Crossing to r. c.) Oh, I suppose we must, but—

P. Just a moment, please. We will name a committee—two of my friends and two of yours—and they will select a fifth person—(Rob shakes his head dubiously.)—and then we shall let them decide for us whether or not we are really suited to each other and may marry with reasonable safety.

R. (Sits beside her and takes her hand.) Phyllis, listen to me. You are talking nonsense, dear. No one could decide that as well as we can. (She tries to withdraw her hand.) You know me well. I have loved you for years and I have kept nothing back from you that could influence your love for me. You don't doubt that I love you, do you? Do you, Phyllis?

P. No.

R. Nor my ability to care for you?

P. Oh, no!

R. Then why tantalize me? Say that you will marry me—soon.

P. (Rising, almost crying, pulling her hand away.) I can't, Rob, I can't! It wouldn't be right.

R. You insist upon appointing this

absurd committee? Upon laying bare the sweetest, most sacred feeling in our lives, and inviting those people to dissect it, examine it, and to pronounce upon its quality?

P. I do.

R. (Rising.) Evidently I have labored under a grave misapprehension. I gathered the impression, somehow, that you cared for me;—that you might even love me.

P. (Piteously.) Oh, I do! I do!

R. Then why in the name of all that is reasonable—

P. Mrs. Treavor says—

R. Hang Mrs. Treavor!

P. Robert!

R. (Bows stiffly.) I beg your pardon.

P. Mrs. Treavor says that our hearts are dangerously deceptive, and that it is only after we have suffered and suffered that we dare trust to their impulses.

R. And so you are making me "suffer and suffer," that you may be certain of me. Is that it?

P. No, dear. But I know so little of sorrow,—my life has been so smooth and so happy and—and we have been—so—so—happy—together—that I can't trust myself. And I must know that I am doing you no wrong before I promise to marry you.

R. (Stepping quickly to her side and taking her hands.) Dear little woman, how could you do me a wrong?

P. You don't seem to understand, Rob, that there are very grave ethical responsibilities to consider. And then, we have said nothing yet of the effect of the sub-conscious mind which, when it is untrained, undeveloped, as—as yours is, dear—may exert a very baleful influence. Some one has said that there are a great many very excellent people who are not at all excellent for each other, and we may be among them.

R. (Positively.) Well, we are not! However, I suppose I must submit—though I think it is arrant nonsense, and worse—it is sacrilegious.

P. Oh, Rob!

R. But we will be even that, if it pleaseth my lady. Come, we will sit here—(She crosses to his right and

they sit on divan)—and select our committee, and—oh, I say, you must let me keep possession of that hand, you know, as a sort of—er—retaining fee—or to—er—quiet my scruples about this jury business. So! Now, you begin.

P. I will name one and then you name one

R. All right. (Kisses her hand.) Fire away!

P. Mrs. Treavor.

R. (Protestingly.) Now, see here, Phyllis, that is hardly fair! Mrs. Treavor belongs to the ultra-anti-masculine wing of the woman movement, and opposes marriage on principle. She is, no doubt, an excellent woman—

P. She is a noble women, Rob, with such profound soul-depth!

R. Hm! Well, I'm not so sure about the soul-depth, girlie. She doesn't seem to have soul-depth enough to appreciate her husband, who is one of the finest, cleanest, most all-round good fellows I ever knew—and I know him well. She doesn't seem to have soul-depth enough to realize that that puny, spindleg-legged boy of hers needs more of her attention than her clubs and classes. (Phyllis withdraws her hand.) She doesn't seem—(R. grows more and more excited as he goes on)—to feel that her husband and son are freezing to death in the extremely rarefied atmosphere of the home that she ought to make warm and cheery and wholesome, while she floats about in a transcendental haze, lecturing to a lot of sentimental women—(Phyllis rises indignantly and crosses to r. c.)—about how to satisfy the soul-hunger of humanity,—humanity with a capital H!

P. (Severely.) I knew that you couldn't be just to Mrs. Treavor, Rob, but I didn't expect you to be brutal. She is my dearest friend, the woman upon whose judgment I most rely.

R. (Jumping up and pacing to and fro across the stage.) Yes, and she is the woman who is responsible for all this foolishness! She fancies herself misunderstood and unappreciated, and prates about her wasted life; she inveighs against men and against mar-

riage, and teaches good, sweet, sensible girls like you to believe that you can't trust to the promptings of your own pure hearts---

P. But---

R. And that there is something in her hazy, remote, bloodless philosophy that will atone to you for the sacrifice of your sacred human yearning for love and all that it brings to a woman. I know her kind, confound 'em, and they are all dangerous!

P. (With freezing dignity.) You forget yourself, Robert! We are not discussing Mrs. Treavor. She is my choice for one member of our committee. (Crosses to l. c.)

R. (Stops walk for a moment.) You will not withdraw her name, Phyllis?

P. (Coldly.) Certainly not.

(She sits near table, pretending to go on with her fancywork, but watches him furtively. He resumes his impatient walk. Suddenly he pauses behind her, puckers up his lips as if to whistle, throws back head in silent laugh; crosses and throws himself upon sofa.)

R. Very well, then. I accept Mrs. Treavor,—though I don't like her,—and I will name—let me see,—Duncan Graham.

P. Rob!

R. (As if surprised.) Well?

P. (Indignantly.) That crusty old bachelor?

R. Why not? Man of excellent judgment, Graham. Scotch, you know. So cool and hard-headed.

P. (Aside.) Pig-headed, you mean!

R. And eminently modern, I should

P. Yes, too modern! He seems to regard married men as victims of untoward circumstances, and he congratulates engaged girls! Horrid old thing!

R. (With great dignity.) Phyllis, you are speaking of a man for whom I have the greatest admiration.

P. (Sitting up very straight.) I don't care! He is horrid! Why, Rob, he will make no end of a fuss.

R. A fuss?

P. Yes; he will be sure to raise a lot of objections. He thought Will Forbes was so foolish to marry Molly

Turner, and she is such a dear, sweet girl, too!

R. Yes, I know. He even tried to argue Forbes out of the notion, and when he failed, he said that the worst feature of congenital idiocy was its hopelessness. (Laughs.)

P. (Indignantly.) I don't see anything funny about that! I suppose he will go about saying that you are a congenital idiot, too. He told me at the Terrys' dinner the other night that he thought you had a great future before you if—(with withering scorn)—you didn't spoil it all by marrying too soon. And then he quoted that silly old saw: "A young man married is a man that's marred." Spiteful old thing!

R. (Aside.) The deuce he did! Bulls-eye, by Jove! (To her, carelessly.) Yes, I know that to be his opinion. That is the reason that I chose him. You know Graham sees so clearly all the obstacles that matrimony puts in a man's way; (Counts them off deliberately on his finger tips.) the added responsibility, the loss of personal liberty, the petty social duties, the possible nagging, the narrowed horizon, the contracted environment, the curtailed opportunities, the—

P. (Hysterically, rising.) You need n't go on, Mr. Chalmers! I have heard quite enough. I wouldn't for anything in the world entail such sacrifice upon you!

R. (Surprised.) My dear little girl, how excitable you are!

P. (Sits suddenly and taps on table with finger tips.) I am not your dear little girl, and I am not in the least excited!

R. But, Phyllis, be calm a moment, and listen to reason.

P. (Springing to her feet.) Reason! Reason! That's like a man! You all care so much more for what you call reason and for practical, sordid considerations, than you do for our happiness! (Turns her back upon him.)

R. (Concealing a smile.) But I understood that this committee was to be formed for eminently practical purposes; to suggest and to consider the objections to our marriage that we

couldn't be expected, under the circumstances, to discover

P. (Over her shoulder.) You seem to have no difficulty in discovering them!

R. But Graham could think of so many more, because, you see, he is not hampered by his love for you. (P. sniffs disdainfully. R. leans back lazily on cushions.) Now, that is settled. Who is your next candidate?

P. (Turning toward him.) Do I understand that you will not withdraw Duncan Graham?

R. (Coolly.) Certainly I will not. Why should I?

P. You want that crabbed, dyspeptic, pessimistic, stubborn, detestable old Scotchman making his cynical comments on—on our love for each other?

R. (Rising and moving toward her, speaking impressively.) But you remember that Mrs. Treavor says that love between a man and a woman is, of itself, an insurmountable subjective obstacle, evanescent in its very nature and paralyzing to the conservation of soul-energy; and that only when these subjective distortions are cast aside and the higher potentialities of the spirit are eduved, can the submerged mentality become transcendently greater in scientific idealism, and the ego, vibrating to a dominant note in the thought-atmosphere, become a finited spirit, potentially whole. (Aside.) I'm afraid I got that mixed!

(P. stares at him a moment in amazement and consternation. Then rushes past him, to sofa.)

P. Oh, Rob! Rob! Rob!

(Throws herself upon sofa, weeping convulsively. He starts toward her, checks himself, shakes head, thrust hands resolutely into trousers pockets, crosses, stands to right of sofa, looking down at her.)

R. (Tenderly.) Phyllis, shall we give up this idea? Shall we put our faith in our love for each other and—(smiles)—chance it?

P. (Rises, wrathful, tearful, defiant.) No! No! No! We can't give it up! But you must withdraw Duncan Graham. I will not have him on

that committee. You understand, Rob?

R. (Aside, coming down stage.) Now for one big, brutal bluff! (To her, sternly.) Phyllis, listen to me. I have yielded thus far to your folly because I hoped that you would see the absurdity of your position. (She makes an imperious gesture, which he ignores.) Your conduct shows me that my hope is vain. Now we will decide this question at once, if you please. You know that I love you; you know what my circumstances are, financially and socially, and what your position as my wife would be. You say that you love me. If you love me you will marry me. (Takes out watch.) I will give you five minutes in which to decide whether or not you will marry me within three months. If at the end of five minutes you have not decided, I shall go away—and I shall not return.—(Phyllis is defiant.) One minute. (P. taps foot and clasps and unclasps hands.) Two minutes. (P. fumbles for handkerchief.) Three minutes. (P. wipes her eyes furtively.) Four minutes. (P. drops on sofa and weeps.) Five minutes. (R. closes watch with a snap and returns it to pocket.) Phyllis, will you marry me? (P. sobs. R. walks rapidly to door, Rob.)

(P. sits up, listens, springs to feet and calls.)

P. Rob! Rob! Rob!

(R appears in doorway.)

R. (Politely.) You called.

P. (Nods and sobs.)

R. You wished to say?

P. (Faintly, half sobbing.) I'll—I'll withdraw—Mrs. Treavor's name from—the committee, if—if—

R. (Coldly.) Well?

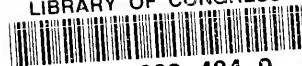
P. (Eagerly.) If you'll withdraw Mr. Graham's.

R. Oh, well, that's fair. Of course I will. But, really—(coming slowly down stage)—I don't see any need of a committee, since—

P. (Beaming, expectant, joyous.) Neither do I, you—you—old goose! (She stretches out her hands to him. He starts toward her, arms extended.)

QUICK CURTAIN.

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